

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 SS-15

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INR-07 IO-13 L-03 NSAE-00 EB-07 NRC-07 OES-06 ERDA-07

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5850

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION OECD PARIS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 15208

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y P A R A 1 L I N E 1

PASS OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ENRG UK TECH

SUBJECT: ROYAL COMMISSION REPORT HEDGES ON FAST BREEDER
REACTOR

1. THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION
ISSUED ON SEPTEMBER 22 ITS REPORT ON NUCLEAR POWER AND
THE ENVIRONMENT. WHILE COMPLIMENTARY OF PAST AND PRES-
ENT NUCLEAR SAFETY PRACTICES, REPORT CASTS DOUBT ON
WISDOM OF PROCEEDING WITH BRITAIN'S FAST BREEDER REACTOR
PROGRAM BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT HAS ESTABLISHED THAT
NUCLEAR SAFETY AND CONTROL ARRANGEMENTS, PARTICULARLY
AS REGARDS NUCLEAR WASTE DISPOSAL, ARE ADEQUATE.
COMMISSION FINDS THAT ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT YET CERTAIN
FAST BREEDERS ARE AS SAFE AS CURRENT COMMERCIAL REACT-
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TORS, IT IS PLAUSIBLE TO BELIEVE THEY WOULD BECOME S

SO. FURTHER, IT IS STATED THAT WHILE ALL PROBLEMS SURROUNDING FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR POWER WERE BEING SORTED OUT, IT WOULD BE UNWISE FOR BRITAIN AS A NATION TO PUT TOO MUCH RELIANCE ON NUCLEAR POWER.

2. COMMISSION REPORT STRESSED DANGERS OF TERRORISTS HIJACKING PLUTONIUM (ALTHOUGH SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS WERE FOUND ACCEPTABLY STRICT) AND MAKING A CRUDE BUT EFFECTIVE WEAPON. IN DISCUSSING PLUTONIUM DISPOSAL PROBLEM, REPORT ARGUES THAT BRITAIN SHOULD NOT RELY ON A REACTOR WHICH PRODUCES HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES SUCH AS PLUTONIUM UNLESS CONVINCED THERE IS NO REASONABLY ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVE.

3. THE COMMISSION DOES NOT CRITICIZE PLANS FOR BRITAIN TO REPROCESS SPENT FUELS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES, EVEN REJECTING HMG'S PROVISION MADE EARLIER THIS YEAR THAT CONTRACTS SHOULD RESERVE RIGHT TO RETURN RADIOACTIVE WASTE. BUT REPORT DOES RECOMMEND A NEW STATE-OWNED COMPANY BE ESTABLISHED WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFE DISPOSAL OF ALL WASTE ARISING AT NUCLEAR SITES. COMMISSION IS CONFIDENT QUESTION OF ULTIMATE STORAGE OF WASTE CAN BE SOLVED IN ACCEPTABLE MANNER AND RECOMMENDS ANNUAL EXPENDITURE OF 500,000 POUNDS STERLING IN THIS REGARD.

4. IN DEALING WITH NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION ISSUE, COMMISSION ESTIMATES NUCLEAR POWER, AND CONSEQUENTLY BASIC MATERIALS FOR WEAPONS, IS PROLIFERATING AT RATE OF ABOUT 14 NATIONS EACH DECADE. HOWEVER IT WELCOMES MEETINGS IN LONDON OF PRINCIPAL EXPORTERS OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGIES MOST CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH WEAPONS.

5. COMMISSION CONCLUDES THAT IF COMMERCIAL FAST BREEDER IS DELAYED, BRITAIN COULD AFFORD TO SPEND MORE ON ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES (INCLUDING NUCLEAR FUSION) AS WELL AS CONSERVATION.

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6. IN PRESENTING REPORT, CHAIRMAN SIR BRIAN FLOWERS NOTED COMMISSION MEMBERS HAD WIDELY DIFFERING VIEWS ON MANY ASPECTS OF SUBJECT BUT WERE UNANIMOUS ON CENTRAL POINTS AT ISSUE. HE OBSERVED THAT IF BRITAIN DID DECIDE TO PROCEED WITH FAST BREEDER, IT SHOULD NOT TREAT IT AS A COMMERCIAL REACTOR BUT AS AN EXPERIMENT. SIR JOHN HILL, CHAIRMAN OF UK ATOMIC ENERGY AUTHORITY, FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF REPORT, REITERATED BELIEF BRITAIN MUST PROCEED NOW WITH FAST BREEDER TO GAIN PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF SOLVING PROBLEMS OF WASTE MATERIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS RAISED. HE WARNED THAT ADVANCED TECHNOLOGICAL NATIONS WERE SHARING TOTALITY OF FAST BREEDER EXPERIENCE. HE NOTED BOTH FRANCE AND WEST GERMANY WERE GOING AHEAD WITH FULL SCALE STATIONS AND THAT BRITAIN WOULD BE DROPPED FROM CLUB UNLESS SHE CONTRIBUTED HER SHARE OF WORK ON BREEDER
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CONCEPT.

7. COPIES OF COMMISSION REPORT ARE BEING POUCHED TO OFFICE OF VICE PRESIDENT, DEPARTMENT, AND ERDA.

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